Kuchel Rejects Racing Brown; Hits GOP Right

By Robert C. Albright 9/21/65
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Sen. Thomas H. Kuchel (R-Calif.) publicly took himself out of the 1966 California gubernatorial race yesterday in a statement that also ripped into the Republican right wing in his State.

He denounced that wing as a "fanatical, neo-fascist, political cult, overcome by a strange mixture of corrosive hatred and sickening fear, recklessly determined to control our Party or to destroy it."

Kuchel said he desires to remain in the Senate, where he is Assistant Republican leader, and where he believes he can best serve his State. He appealed to "reasonable" California Republicans to "unite behind one reasonable candidate, untainted by extremism, and then to nominate and elect him."

A Republican progressive himself, Kuchel failed at this time to indicate his personal choice of a moderate to make the race against Ronald Reagan, the movie actor and conservative candidate for the GOP nomination. Reagan enjoys widespread support among California right-wing Republicans.

Kuchel predicted that Republican extremists will be repudiated if the "choice is clear" to California Republicans.

"That choice must not be frustrated away in the June primary by the appearance on the ballot of several candidates sharing essentially the same views," he said.

George Christopher, former Mayor of San Francisco, former Gov. Goodwin J. Knight have been mentioned among other GOP moderates who might make the race. Laughlin E. Waters, a Los Angeles lawyer, recently became the first declared candidate.

Kuchel is understood to favor a thoroughgoing sampling of Republican opinion throughout the State to determine the most "electable" GOP moderate. He thinks the entire moderate wing must participate in this winnowing process in advance of the primaries.

The California Field poll in mid-August indicated that Kuchel himself could run the best race against Democratic Gov. Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, who is expected to seek a third term.

But the poll showed Kuchel as trailing Reagan among Republican voters.

The 55-year-old Kuchel, who first came to the Senate in January, 1953, has been under heavy pressure from GOP moderates to run for Governor. But he likes the Senate and believes his future lies there.

For the last seven years he has been Senate Republican whip, placing him in line for his Party's top Senate leadership post. The Senate's 32-member minority is delicately balanced between conservatives and moderates, but the odds appear slightly in Kuchel's favor should a vacancy occur in the No. 1 leadership role.

Since 1960, Kuchel has outspokenly attacked the John Birch Society and the ultra-right. In 1962 he battled right-wing opposition for reelection and survived. A few months later he made his famous "fright peddlers" speech, charging a flood of fright mail was being dumped on the Senate from self-styled "I-am-a-better-American-than-you-are-organizations."

When attacks on his character were made by the publisher of a right-wing newsletter and others, Kuchel filed charges of criminal libel. He won abject apologies from his accusers.

In removing himself from the Governor's race, he returned furiously to his fray with the right wing yesterday.

"Its members label anyone who even mildly disagrees with any of their extraordinary views, a socialist, or a Communist, or even worse," he said.

"Character assassination is a part of their stock in trade, as I I particularly have a right to state. Their un-Republican dogma has no more place in our Party than the odious teachings of communism. They should be, and will be, repudiated by our Party if the choice is clear, and made clear to all California Republicans.